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Cover illustration: Wesley Church,
Arundel Street, Portsmouth, 1845–1941.

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METHODISM IN PORTSMOUTH 1750-1932

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Methodism, a product of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, has had an important influence on the religious and social life of Portsmouth. The divisions within Methodism had their own organisation and places of worship till the Methodist Union of 1932. Prior to that date Portsmouth Methodism consisted of three groups: Wesleyans, Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists, divided from one another on matters of organisation and lay influence, and attitude to revival. There were other divisions of Methodism, but they did not appear in Portsmouth. The Wesleyans, always the strongest numerically, owed their origin to John Wesley's regular visits between 1753 and 1790. The Bible Christians began as a group of revivalists in the West Country; they first became organised in Portsmouth in 1824, and the town became one of their firm strongholds on the south coast. The Primitive Methodists separated from the Wesleyans, refusing to submit to the Wesleyan central control over field-preaching in particular. They first appeared in Portsmouth in 1849. Throughout the period 1750–1932, Portsmouth Methodism involved much investment and expenditure in church-building and charitable work; a flexibility of organisation allowing churches to be located in growing suburbs, even though this brought problems for town centre churches; a changing social and political outlook among Methodists themselves; and the offer of a way of life to as many as wished to listen.

* * *

The formative years of Wesleyan Methodism in Portsmouth were written of in detail as long ago as 1894, and most histories of individual churches have repeated the story.[1] What was remarkable about Wesley's visits, however, was their frequency: what was significant were his attempts to encourage and at the same time consolidate the strength of the Methodist societies. A group was certainly in existence in 1750, holding Calvinistic beliefs and belonging to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, but it had little direct influence on Portsmouth Methodism subsequently. Then Wesley came in 1753, in July and October of that year. He returned in 1758, every year from 1767 to 1772, in 1774, '75, '76, '78, '79, '80, '82, '83, '84, '85, '88, '89 and in 1790, a total of twenty-two personal visits in thirty-eight years. No subsequent leader of any branch of Methodism has equalled the record since. What he strove to do on these visits, usually in October of the year, was to encourage revival and devotion, but at the same time, as the revival advanced under its own momentum, to control a rapidly expanding organisation. He wished to impose order and discipline and on his last visits to consolidate the position. On his two visits in 1753 he at first found the situation a little discouraging. In July he was disturbed at 'that accursed itch of disputing', and in October the 'people . . . had disputed themselves out of the power, and wellnigh the form, of religion'. 'I made no account', he stated, 'of that shadow of a society which was before, without classes, without order or rules, having never seen, read or heard the printed rules which ought to have been given them at their very first meeting.' Nevertheless, on both occasions he was impressed with his reception when he preached, the large congregations being 'well-behaved'. It was in the October that he attempted to introduce some directive to the revival in the town:

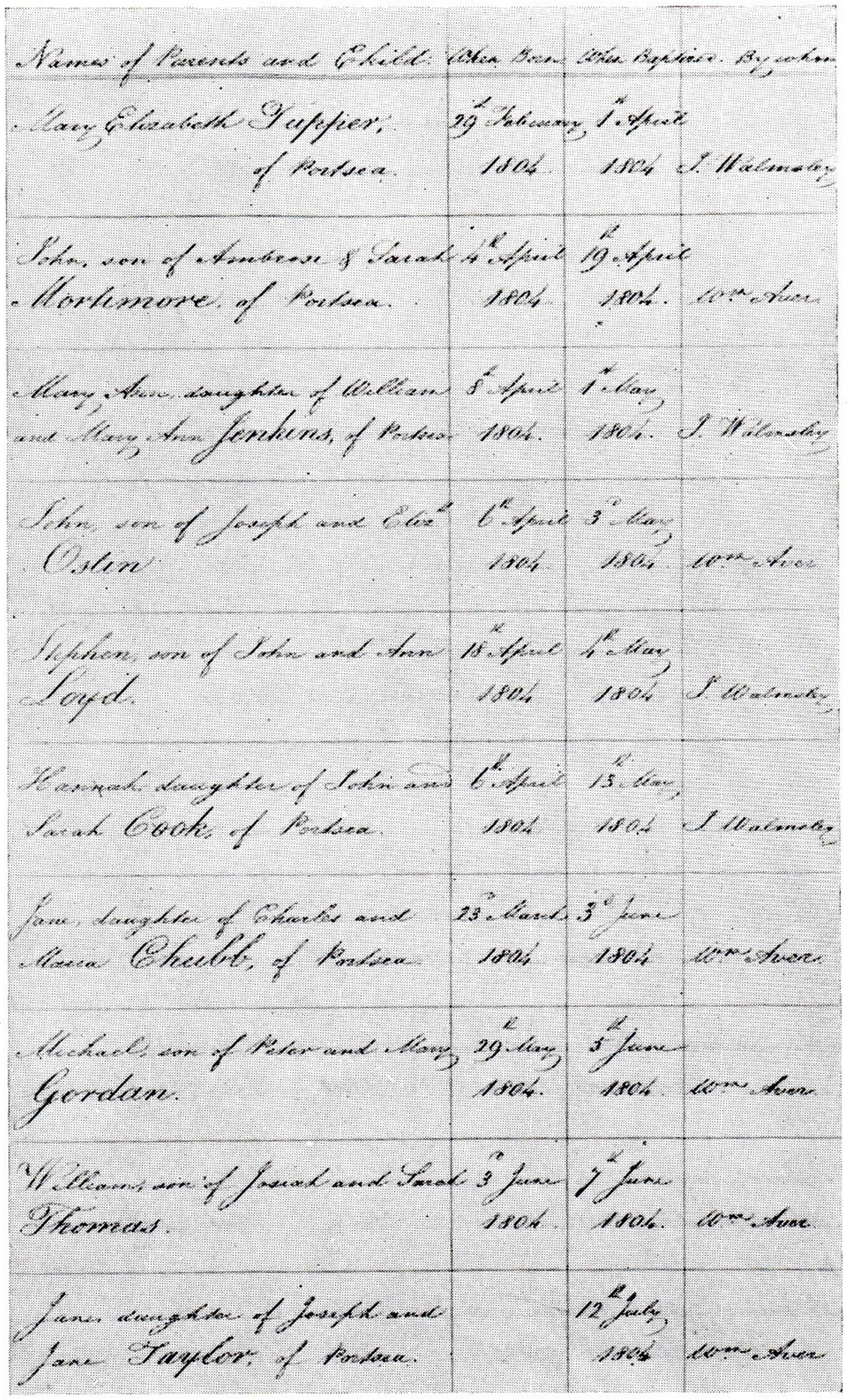
> I explained to them at large the nature and design of our societies, and desired that, if any of them were willing to join therein, they would call on me, either that evening or in the morning.

Early the next month there is evidence that Wesley was ordering 'a little box of books' for Portsmouth; this was very probably the sequel to the previous month's response. In 1785, when preaching in Portsea, he commented that 'after all the stumbling-blocks which have been thrown in the way, God will have many souls in this place'.[2]

It would seem that the early years were far from secure, especially regarding membership of the societies. In the membership lists of 1757 and 1762 were many names which failed to re-appear in 1767.[3] Some may have joined the Congregationalists or the Church of England: others were lost by the wayside. By 1789, however, Wesley encouraged 'the serious congregation . . . to leave the first principles and go on to perfection'. The size and good behaviour of the congregations he preached to received very favourable comment; on one occasion, there was insufficient accommodation, and another time, the people were 'more noble than most in the South of England'.[4] The services were not, however, completely free from trouble. In 1772 for instance, at the Bishop Street meeting-house in Portsea (which was sold and probably helped towards the purchase of St. Peter's Chapel, Daniel Street, in 1800), there was an upsetting incident. At the Portsmouth Sessions in October 1772, four individuals were prosecuted for coming among and disturbing the worshipping congregation; each one had been 'talking aloud, making a loud Noise with his Feet, laughing aloud, and behaving himself in a very indecent and irreverent Manner'.[5] In addition, while

Register of Baptisms 1804, St. Peter's Chapel, Daniel Street. Portsea.

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.



Names of Parents and Child.	When Born.	When Baptized.	By whom.
Mary Elizabeth Pepper, of Portsea.	29th February 1804	1st April 1804	J. Walmsley
John, son of Ambrose & Sarah Mortimore, of Portsea.	4th April 1804	19th April 1804.	W. Shaw
Mary Ann, daughter of William and Mary Ann Jenkins, of Portsea	8th April 1804.	1st May 1804.	J. Wilcocks
John, son of Joseph and Eliz. Ostin	6th April 1804	3rd May 1804	W. Shaw
Stephen, son of John and Ann Lloyd.	12th April 1804	4th May 1804	J. Walmsley
Hannah, daughter of John and Sarah Cook, of Portsea.	6th April 1804	13th May 1804	J. Walmsley
Jane, daughter of Charles and Maria Chubb, of Portsea	23rd March 1804	3rd June 1804	W. Shaw
Michael, son of Peter and Mary Gordan.	29th May 1804.	3rd June 1804.	W. Shaw
William, son of Joseph and Sarah Thomas.	3rd June 1804.	17th June 1804.	W. Shaw
Jane, daughter of Joseph and Jane Taylor, of Portsea.		12th July 1804	W. Shaw

the size of the congregations Wesley preached to in Portsmouth was always encouraging, the results of the revival were problematic to him. An extract from a letter he wrote to Portsmouth in 1784 is revealing:

> . . . I am glad our preachers at Portsmouth do not coop themselves up in the preaching-houses. The work of God can never make any considerable progress but by field-preaching. . . .[6]

One feels that he was never completely at ease about the way the societies developed. Thus, in 1779, Wesley expressed concern regarding the Bishop Street meeting-house for which a mortgage had been raised in 1768. He wrote:

> It seems to me that you take the matter exactly right with regard to the Portsmouth preaching-house, and that the only thing to be done is to get the mortgage out of Mr. Pike's hands.

He was nevertheless pleased to open, in 1788, the new chapel on the site of the Green Rails public house in Oyster Street, replacing the room in Warblington Street which had been used since 1767. His motive was to exercise control. In July of 1788 the question of the relationship with the Church of England was raised. Whether or not separation was ever contemplated, Wesley wrote quite firmly on this occasion:

> . . . If all our Society at Portsmouth or elsewhere separate from the Church, I cannot help it. But I will not. Therefore I can in no wise consent to the having of service in church hours. . . .

'I must', he wrote to someone else six days later, 'go round by Portsmouth to open the new preaching-house.' This he did in August 1788. Portsmouth was in the Sarum (Salisbury) Circuit at this time. Only two years after opening the Oyster Street chapel, Wesley wrote to Salisbury (March 1790):

> . . . I am in no haste at all concerning building without having paid some more of our debts. I am likewise in no haste to multiply preachers or divide circuits. Most of our circuits are too small rather than too large. . . .

This question of building and debts is a recurring theme, as we shall see, throughout the tale of Portsmouth Methodism. The question of the Circuit was decided at the Conference in July 1790. In March, Wesley had seemed opposed to divide circuits, but now, for some reason, the Sarum Circuit, which included Swanage, Blandford, Salisbury, Winchester, Southampton and Chichester, was divided down the middle into the Sarum and Portsmouth Circuits.[7] All in all, it would seem that Wesley had wanted to consolidate the gains during these years before his death, for he died early in 1791 only six months after a stormy journey from the Isle of Wight to Portsmouth. The trouble was that he had to come to terms with the desires, initiative and indeed powers that the revival threw up locally in Portsmouth. Another of the story's themes has emerged.

In 1790, then, Portsmouth became a separate circuit. The following year, Portsmouth with Sarum were listed as one of the nineteen English Districts; the Portsmouth Circuit paid the largest quarterly contribution (£7 10s.) to the District. In 1797 Southampton, which had been part of the Portsmouth Circuit, became a separate circuit.[8] In Portsea the society bought, in 1800, St. Peter's Chapel in Daniel Street for £1,200 to replace Bishop Street. St. Peter's had formerly been used since 1787 by a rebel group of Anglicans, possibly having sympathies with the Methodists. In Portsmouth the society built a new chapel on the site of a former Quaker meeting house in Green Row (later Pembroke Road) in 1811 at a cost of £7,500 to replace Oyster Street chapel. Both these efforts – including enlargements to St. Peter's in 1810 costing £5,000 – were at first sight remarkable during a period of war. They should not conceal, however, the fact that much debt was incurred; in the case of Green Row £6,260 was

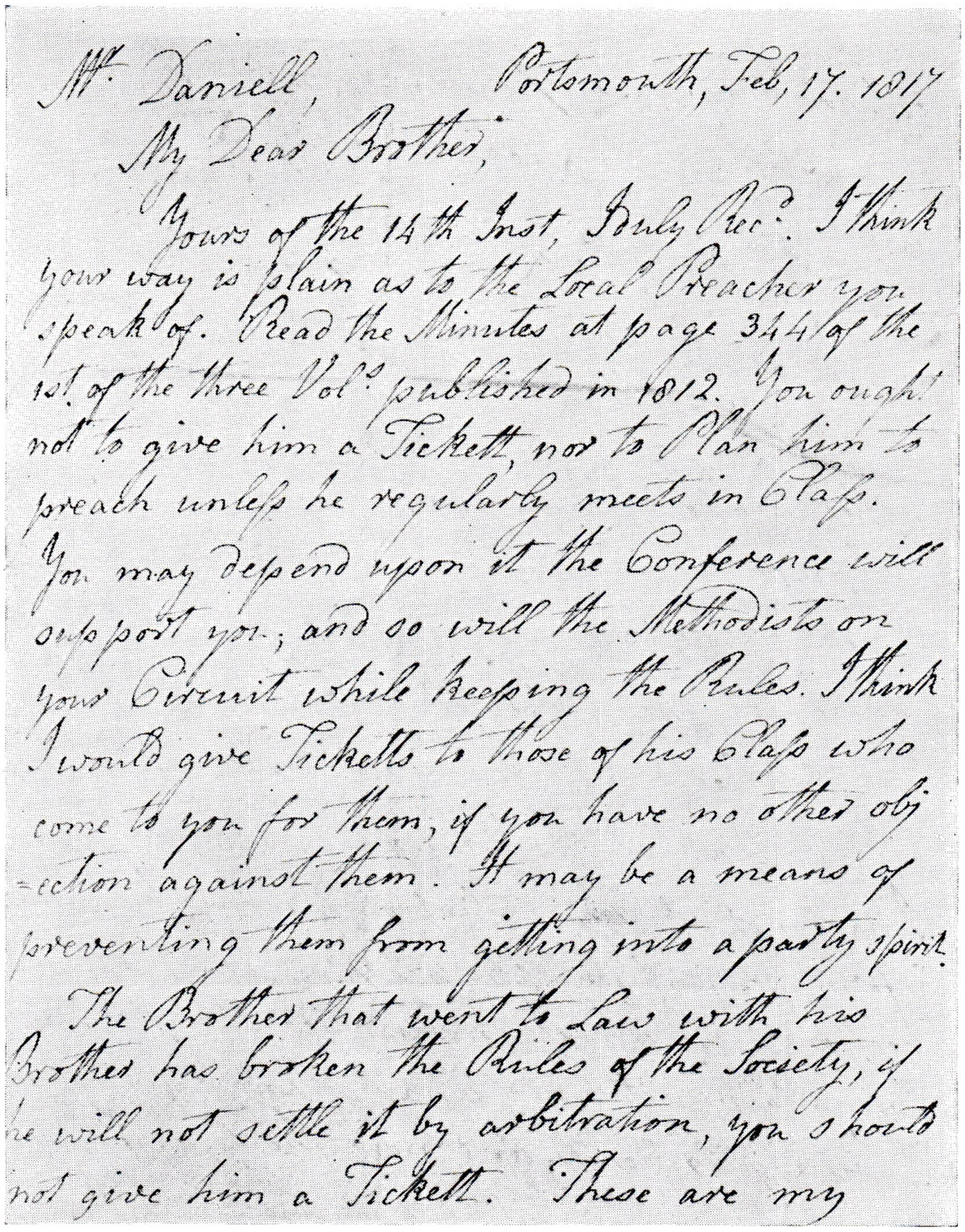
borrowed. If Methodists had taken stock of their achievement and social influence in Portsmouth in the early years of the nineteenth century, they would no doubt have been content with their progress. By 1811 the Methodist movement extended not only beyond the limits of the old town into the recently urbanised Portsea (Portsmouth Common) where Wesley first and often preached, but also expanded to the north-east into the Landport district where a Sunday School was begun in 1805. In 1805 the Portsmouth and Portsea societies had eighteen classes and a membership of 385; in the same year both St. Peter's and Oyster Street Chapels ranked with the Baptist meeting-houses in contributing towards the Patriotic Fund. When the new Green Row Chapel was opened in 1811 it had 938 members, and its poor rates were assessed at £100 per annum in contrast to the £50 per annum of the Baptist chapel in St. Thomas's Street.[9]

The curious facts about the opening of Green Row were the reference to it in the press as a 'Dissenting' Chapel and the presence at the opening of the local Congregational minister.[10] The position of the Wesleyans with regard to the Church of England on the one hand and Dissent on the other was subject to change throughout the century. There was a level of co-operation with other Dissenters over Sunday Schools in the early years of the nineteenth century by which Portsmouth Methodists must have made a great impact on society. This is not to say that other good works were neglected. Joseph Webb, for instance, who came to Portsmouth in 1767 and was prominent at Warblington Street, was noted for his charity; on one occasion, 2 January 1815, the *Hampshire Telegraph* recorded that 'last Saturday' he 'distributed his annual bounty of good beef to the poor of these towns and neighbourhood'. In 1812 Wesleyan ministers visited thousands of French prisoners-of-war confined in ships in Portsmouth Harbour.[11] The Portsmouth and Portsea Benevolent or Stranger's Friend Society held regular meetings at St. Peter's Chapel in the 1830s; the Society helped needy cases with money and visiting.[12] But it was perhaps not so much in the charitable deeds that the greatest influence was felt, but more in the evangelical drive the Wesleyans possessed for the establishment of Sunday Schools. A Methodist Sunday School Union was formed (exactly when is uncertain) of all children taught in the other Dissenting Sunday Schools in Portsmouth; there was an anniversary meeting in 1817 at Green Row Chapel, but after that date no further reference to this ecumenical effort has been found. The Wesleyans, after leading in this venture, retreated into isolation and contented themselves with managing their own schools. Whereas other Dissenting Sunday Schools continued to hold joint meetings, for example in 1835, 1837 and 1840 (references to Methodists in the local press in the 1820s are unfortunately rare), the Wesleyan Sunday Schools invariably met separately. The earliest Wesleyan Sunday School was in Warblington Street in 1803, then in 1805 a start was made at Oxford Street, Landport, which was in effect the beginnings of Wesley Chapel in Arundel Street. By 1840 there were Wesleyan Sunday Schools not only at the two chapels in Portsmouth and Portsea, but also at Landport, Fratton, Stamshaw, Gravel Lane and Greenwich Place. By 1841 Daniel Street Sunday School claimed to have educated nearly 6,000 children; by 1844 Green Row put their figure at 4,267.[13] The real social effects of this are difficult to assess. 'There is evidence', writes K. S. Inglis[14] of the national situation, that 'they [Sunday Schools] were attended mostly by working-class children . . . and that they enrolled hundreds of thousands who belonged later in life to no church.' Despite the two chapels' failure to make members out of all their Sunday School scholars, this was the only education these several thousand children received and the influence on Portsmouth society must therefore have been significant, though impossible to measure in meaningful terms.

What, however, were the causes of the Wesleyans' brief flirtation with other Dissenters? At root was the tension within Wesleyanism between central control and local initiative. The latter produced a dissenting coalition over, for example, Sunday Schools: the central direction of the Wesleyans, increasingly exercised by Jabez Bunting as the first half of the century advanced, resulted in Wesleyan isolation. Wesley himself had wished to consolidate, and some of the same problems of the previous century persisted too. Rev. W. Myles, of Green Row Chapel, wrote in 1817:

> Our connection is in a very embarrassed state. This is oweing [sic] to muliplying [sic] Chapels and calling for Travelling Preachers; and now the people are not able, or not willing to support them. I wrote to Mr. Bunting that I saw no way we could take, as we could not stop the people from Building, but by our not calling out any more Preachers till the Connexion could support those that were now labouring on the Circuits.

Bunting visited Portsmouth in 1818, 1839, 1843 and 1845 and possibly on other occasions. The Wesleyans took up an official, neutral position midway between Church and Dissent. When Wesley Chapel in Arundel Street was re-registered as a place of worship in 1854 the words 'Protestant Dissenters from the Church of



Mr. Daniell, Portsmouth, Feb. 17. 1817

My Dear Brother,

Yours of the 14th Inst, duly rec.d. I think your way is plain as to the Local Preacher you speak of. Read the Minutes at page 344 of the 1st of the three Vol.s published in 1812. You ought not to give him a Ticket, nor to Plan him to preach unless he regularly meets in Class. You may depend upon it the Conference will uphold you; and so will the Methodists on your Circuit while keeping the Rules. I think I would give Tickets to those of his Class who come to you for them, if you have no other objection against them. It may be a means of preventing them from getting into a party spirit.

The Brother that went to Law with his Brother has broken the Rules of the Society, if he will not settle it by arbitration, you should not give him a Ticket. These are my

Manuscript letter from Reverend W. Myles.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Libraries.

England' were struck through in the certificate.[15] The Wesleyans, from about 1820, adhered firmly to their denomination, and gained a certain inward-looking respectability in the process. But the control over local feelings in Portsmouth was not absolute nor did it abolish financial troubles. The political sentiments of Methodists have been much discussed, and the most recent conclusions (though by no means the final ones) regarding the 1830s and 1840s are that there were no strong links between the Wesleyans and the Tory party and that all branches of Methodism shared the official 'no-politics' rule.[16] Whether or not Methodism saved England from revolution, Bunting's aim for the Connexion was certainly to exclude anything of a disruptive, reforming or suspicious nature, protecting the denomination against political and social trouble. Such control, however, in the ferment of the 1830s and 1840s, could not be total. In 1837, for instance, the Portsmouth Wesleyans took it upon themselves to hold an Anti-Church Rate meeting, not, significantly, on chapel premises, but at Totterdell's Rooms, Portsea – 'with the object of disavowing the declarations which have been made in Parliament and elsewhere, that the sentiments of this numerous and influential body are in favor of the continuance of the Church Rates'. After the passing of the Reform Bill into law in 1832 there had been an increase in dissenting confidence throughout the country. The *Hampshire Telegraph* (1 May 1837) continued:

> Resolutions were passed and petitions were adopted, declaring the support of religion by coercive means, to be unjust and impolitic; approving of the measure proposed by the Governmer t for their entire abolition, and praying that it may pass into a Law. The several motions were proposed and advocated with ability by local preachers, leaders and private members of the Wesleyan body. The principle that "every man had a right to think for himself on political and ecclesiastical subjects" was strongly advocated . . . Mr. Sherwell, brother of the worthy Superintendent of this Circuit, . . . believed that the great majority of the Methodist ministers were decidedly in favour of the views of the meeting, but were prevented taking the lead of the people on this question by the peculiar constitution of their religious economy. . . .

At this meeting can be seen the early stages of what was to develop later in the century into the nonconformist conscience. One must nevertheless consider this meeting unofficial and to that extent untypical. The kind of meeting which conformed was one – recorded in the same newspaper on 6 May 1844 – on chapel premises in Daniel Street when the Wesleyans recalled their opposition to the government's education scheme in the previous year. The Wesleyan reaction was to push ahead with their own scheme for education and £40 at least was raised at the meeting.

A great deal of money was also raised in Portsmouth

for foreign missions; there were many missionary meetings reported in the press, almost annually in the 1830s, and the Mayor, Daniel Howard, presided at one in 1842. But while much was raised for this work, for instance the proceeds of a Ladies' Bazaar in 1826 were £35, Green Row Chapel was sinking further and further into debt. A special committee to aid the trustees was formed in 1834. In November 1833 the eighth anniversary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society for the Portsmouth District had been celebrated at Green Row; while £41 was collected for overseas missions on this occasion, it is clear that Green Row Chapel was several thousand pounds in debt. At the first meeting of the special committee the next year (11 November 1834):

> A letter from the Treasurers of the Chapel Loan Fund Committee at Manchester was read, offering £2,500 on condition that the Portsmouth Trustees raise £1,500 and pay off £4,000 of the debt.

It is a tribute to local initiative that this money was raised within two years. In 1836 the Chapel was repaired and gas-lighting installed, a feature enjoyed by Daniel Street since 1823.[17]

To add to the Wesleyans' troubles, the town continued to expand towards Landport. In retrospect can be seen the dilemma, not of central-local tension, but another theme – more chapels versus limited resources, the law of diminishing returns. This is not to say that by moving to the suburbs they did not invest in good markets; but to have made it economically more viable town centre sites could have been sold. This was, quite naturally, considered a retrograde step and the first sale did not occur till after 1900 by which time there were more than a dozen churches. What, then, occasioned the building of Wesley Chapel in Arundel Street, opened in 1845? The missionary spirit, which produced a Wesleyan Sunday School in Landport since 1805 at various locations, culminated in a building fund in 1834, and was supported by both Daniel Street and Green Row (even though this was the very year of Green Row's crisis). Ten years later at the foundation stone laying ceremony, the *Hampshire Telegraph* (31 August 1844) commented:

> . . . The population of the Landport division of the Island of Portsea is not only already great, but is, from various causes, daily increasing . . . We are therefore pleased to see, in addition to the places of worship already erected, another, which bids fair to exert a salutary influence on the neighbourhood . . . having the front in Arundel Street and the back entrance in Chandos Street and being easy of access to the neighbourhoods of Kingston, Fratton and Marie-la-Bonne. . . .

When Wesleyans at Daniel Street in 1843 gave a subscription of £30 towards the building they were obviously conscious of needs to be served in growing areas. Regarding their support for Arundel Street, however, it is not possible to be exact about the main motive for feeling they ought to support more chapel-building in another area. That they wanted to provide preaching to the unconverted there is no doubt, but probably a stronger motive was that some of their own members had already moved from Portsea to Landport or were considering to do so. In 1843, for instance, seat rents at Daniel Street were in arrears, suggesting a declining congregation, possibly through removal. At the quarterly meeting at Daniel Street in October 1843 it was resolved:

> That considering the number of members now in connexion with the Methodist Church in Landport – the Sabbath Schools – and the already dense and growing population, this meeting is convinced of the necessity of erecting a commodious chapel in that locality. . . .

In 1894 it was believed that the opening of Arundel Street was 'one of the chief causes' of Daniel Street's decline. The membership dropped from three hundred in 1838 to two hundred in 1854.[18]

* * *

During these years of the Wesleyan retreat from Dissent, their foreign missionary meetings, pastoral oversight, and disciplined non-radical behaviour, another branch of Methodism had become established in Portsmouth. Firstly, they gathered in the area denoting the beginnings of Southsea where there was no Anglican Church opened till 1822; and then at Landport well before the fund for Wesley Chapel in Arundel Street was begun. The Bible Christians advanced from the West Country, possibly because of seafaring connections. They displayed an evangelical fervour and quickly won a staunch group of supporters. Their first chapel was in Little Southsea Street, probably built in 1822, and known as Bethesda. In 1824 services were held on Southsea Common, and in the same year, just as Warblington Street had been crowded in 1768 when Wesley preached, Little Southsea Street Chapel was full, 'hundreds being unable to get in', to hear Mary Billing and Mary O'Bryan preach. In Landport, where there was no Anglican place of worship opened till 1828, the Bible Christians used (from December 1825 onwards) a building in York Street erected since 1820, calling it Messiah Chapel at first, but after September 1827, Emmanuel. Between 1825 and 1847 it was always numerically

Little Southsea Street Bible Christian Chapel, 1896.

stronger than Little Southsea Street. In 1825 the societies were established as a separate 'station' of the denomination, and had sixty class members. There were missions conducted at Copnor (1825), Gosport (1826), Hayling Island, Chichester and Selsey (1829) and Cosham (1837–9). It would seem, however, that just as the Wesleyans had membership troubles at first, so too did the Bible Christians. In 1847, for instance, their membership had risen only to sixty-seven and this was below the national average increase. In that year, all the same, they were able to open a new chapel in Grosvenor Street, replacing Little Southsea Street. By 1849 it led numerically over Emmanuel Chapel. From 1848 to 1851 the Bible Christian membership in Portsmouth almost doubled, and made up for the stability of the 1830s and 1840s. In October 1848 Emmanuel had forty-four and Grosvenor Street forty-two members: in September 1851 the figures had risen to fifty-nine and one hundred and eight. At Grosvenor Street in 1852 was held the first Bible Christian Conference outside Devon and Cornwall.[19]

In the middle of these dramatic years, in 1849, two events occurred. The Primitive Methodists appeared in Portsmouth from the North of England, and the Wesleyans experienced internal conflict culminating in outright secession in some parts of the country with huge total losses by 1855. The Primitives held their first services in Dock Row and later in Marie-la-Bonne, and their first chapel was in existence by 1851, the Zoar Chapel in Wellington Street (off Grosvenor Street) with a total of 130 worshippers on the evening of 30 March 1851 when a census of religious worship was taken nationally.[20] Regarding the second event, there is no evidence that Portsmouth Wesleyans suffered in the 1849 disruption. Certainly no secessions occurred; if they did, they did not last. The great success of the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists might hint at some dissatisfaction with the Wesleyans, though the favourable economic climate of these years may have been of greater importance. But once the bitterness – if any – faded and time marched on there is evidence of some gain to the Wesleyans. In 1851 the Wesleyans were using Little Southsea Street Chapel which the Bible Christians relinquished for Grosvenor Street on expiry of the lease. In the late 1850s and the 1860s many names were left off the Grosvenor Street class books for various reasons, such as inconsistent conduct or removal, but also for joining the Wesleyans. One particularly trying episode for the Quarterly and Elders' Meetings concerned Mr. W. H. Rayner. In February 1863 he was found 'guilty of slander and evil-speaking towards Br. W. Good'. The Elders suspended him for three months, 'but we earnestly hope he may see his error, and become restored'. Then, in June 1864, the Quarterly Meeting resolved:

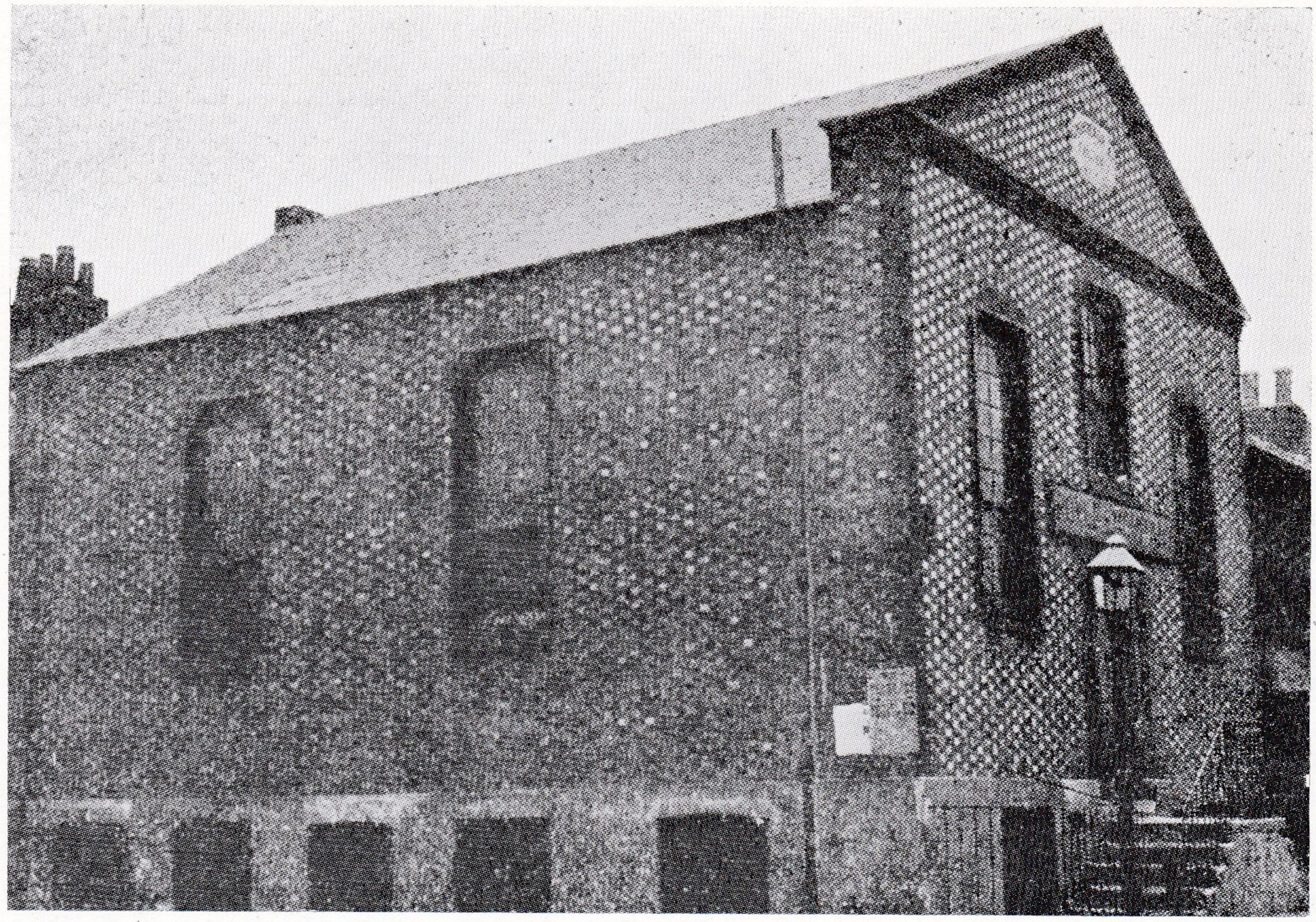
> That as W. H. Rayner has sent a letter to our Pastor containing unfounded statements and insolent language, – has been at former times proved guilty of slander and evil-speaking, – and in various other ways, has for years been a trouble among us, we unanimously resolve that he be informed that he will no longer be considered a member of this church.

The upshot was that he joined the Wesleyans. Perhaps the case was exceptional and the Wesleyans pursued a policy of exclusion too, for in June 1871 the Bible Christian Circuit Quarterly Meeting noted:

> That having received information to the effect that Mr. W. Rayner, formerly a Member and Local Preacher among us, and at present with the Wesleyans, is anxious to be again united to us in Church-fellowship, this meeting authorises Mr. Gilbert [the Pastor] to inform Mr. Rayner that we shall hail his return to our fellowship with pleasure. Mr. Gilbert is also requested to see one of the Wesleyan ministers and explain to him the reasons for taking this course, with a view to prevent any misunderstanding between ourselves and the Wesleyan friends in this Circuit.

Yet something went wrong; Rayner's name appeared on the Wesleyan Green Row Circuit plan in 1878.[21]

Whatever the relationships between Wesleyans, Bible Christians and Primitives in the first three-quarters of the century, there were at root social and economic differences. For instance, one may contrast Emmanuel Chapel bought for £315 in 1825 and Grosvenor Street built for just under £1,118 in 1847, with Wesley Chapel, Arundel Street costing in 1845 in the region of £2,160–£2,500. If it follows that the Wesleyans were wealthier, that must be qualified in



Grosvenor Street Bible Christian Chapel, c. 1890.

two ways. Each denomination had a fair proportion of tradesmen, craftsmen and shopkeepers in Portsmouth, and secondly, the Wesleyans were always more numerous anyway. The baptism registers of the Bible Christian Circuit give fathers' occupations: in 1840 and 1850 there were, for example, shoemakers, a shipwright and a grocer; in 1860 a merchant, an 'officer' and a brickmaker; and in 1870 an engineer and a sea captain. The trustees of the Wingfield Street Wesleyans in 1878 included a shipwright, draper and builder. These are only examples, but point to the fact that the social differences between Bible Christians and Wesleyans ought not to be exaggerated, particularly, we shall see, as the century advanced.[22] Secondly, the Wesleyans always led numerically. On Census Sunday in 1851, throughout Portsea Island, there were worshipping in the morning 2,325 at Wesleyan places of worship, 115 at the Primitives' and 456 at the Bible Christians' places of worship. In the afternoon the figures were given as 319, 109 and 517; in the evening, 1,910, 130 and 552. Whatever defects in the methods used in the Census, it does nevertheless present an overall picture of all Methodist and other denominations' worship. One very important fact is certain. Whereas at a national level in 1851 the Methodists of all groups were the strongest denomination after the Church of England, this was not true of Portsmouth where the Baptists and Congregationalists were stronger. The Baptists had more places of worship than the three Methodist groups put together, and the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, while having fewer places of worship, provided more seats and mustered larger congregations at morning and evening, though not the afternoon, services on 30 March 1851. Another fact elucidated by Horace Mann in the published Census was that Wesleyan membership increased nationally twice as quickly as the population between 1800 and 1850.[23] Despite the fact that the Wesleyans kept more records (or at least more have survived) insufficient statistics are available to allow any definite comparison with Portsmouth. Between 1801 and 1851 Portsmouth's population more than doubled, rising from 32,166 to 72,096. In 1805 the two Wesleyan societies had a membership of 385: the highest attendance in all Portsea Island's Wesleyan places of worship on Sunday, 30 March 1851, was in the morning – a total congregation of 2,325. Attendance was always reckoned to be higher than membership in the nineteenth century.[24] One can therefore put membership at about 1,200 at the most, and deduce that Portsmouth fell below the national rate of increase. Population more than doubled and membership (though its figures are for 1805, not 1801) probably increased four times at the very most. Bunting commented in 1854 that theirs was originally a rural system.[25] Even though Wesleyans were more numerous than Bible Christians and Primitives, Bunting's attitude, coupled with attempts to contain revival within the denomination, explains something of the background to the numerical and institutional development of Wesleyanism in Portsmouth hitherto. This did not result in geographical stability. The Arundel Street Chapel was opened, as we have seen, in 1845 with seats for 850. For the same year a Wesleyan Prayer Leaders' Plan has survived; there were mid-week prayer meetings not only at Green Row, Daniel Street and Wesley Chapels, but also at Stamshaw, Fratton, Greenwich Place and four other locations, suggesting no complete break with the religious behaviour of earlier days of revival.

On 7 May 1844 the *Hampshire Telegraph* noted that the Portsmouth District (created 1812) included Salisbury, Southampton, Poole, Ringwood, Andover, Gosport, Chichester and the Isle of Wight, and had a total of 4,600 members. The next two decades are difficult to classify. Some reference has already been made to the development of the three Methodist groups in this period of British history which has been considered an 'age of equipoise'.[26] As far as the Portsmouth Wesleyans were concerned, there was certainly a lull in their chapel-building before the remarkable efforts of the last quarter of the century. The denominational barriers persisted, but there were several signs of what became known as the nonconformist conscience cutting across divisions and involving changed attitudes.

Green Row did not seem to be affected by the opening of Arundel Street as Daniel Street had. The move to the suburbs was complicated by members who continued to travel. At a bazaar at Green Row in 1852, all the participants did not live nearby and about half lived in Southsea which was becoming increasingly fashionable. As late as about 1900 one of the trustees walked regularly from his home at North End. Sunday School building took place at Fratton Road in 1858. Just as Arundel Street grew out of Sunday School enterprise, this Sunday School at Fratton Road (begun in fact by some Arundel Street members) developed into the Buckland Chapel opened in 1875. There were further school buildings at Arundel Street in 1860 – to which was added a day school in 1865 – and at Green Row in 1863. In 1865 a meeting was held at Arundel Street regarding building at Highland Road, Eastney. A hint of nonconformist co-operation appeared at its opening in 1867 when a Baptist minister preached, a situation recalling the opening of Green Row in 1811 and remaining latent in Portsmouth Wesleyanism up till now.[27]

The revival which reached Britain from America *via* Wales and Scotland in 1859, and the economic boom of that year, would seem to have had a greater effect on the Bible Christians and Primitives than on the Wesleyans. In 1861 the Bible Christian chapel in Stamford Street, Landport, was opened (replacing Emmanuel by January 1863); also in 1861 the Primitive Methodists opened their Jubilee Chapel in Somers Road. The next year the Bible Christians changed their label from the Portsea to the Portsmouth Mission. But all in all, the 1860s, after a good start, were not too successful for the Bible Christians. Mention has already been made of losses to the Wesleyans, but moreover some of the denominational drill which had been exercised upon the Wesleyans seemed curiously evident. In 1863, a Sunday School separated from the Bible Christians, becoming established in Middle Street, Southsea. It was firmly decided by the Circuit Quarterly Meeting that they could not be united to the denomination, and later in the year the Grosvenor Street Elders resolved:

> That as the friends who left us and formed a Sunday School in Middle Street evince a desire to be reunited with us, we agree cordially to receive them; but at present we cannot see our way clear to connect ourselves in any manner with their school.

In 1871 the Grosvenor Street Elders refused to allow a 'Tea and Testimonial Meeting' in Havelock Park which the Superintendent of Albert Road Sunday School wished to hold. After disobeying instructions and 'illegally' – as it was put – taking tables and forms from Albert Road for the meeting, he was excluded from membership. The very society at Albert Road was short-lived; preaching first took place there in 1863 in a school-room before the chapel was built in 1867. But in 1875 it was sold to the Primitive Methodists. Despite Conferences of the Bible Christian denomination at Grosvenor Street in 1862 and at Stamford Street (which secured a numerical lead over Grosvenor Street by 1872) in 1866 and 1873, and even though Sunday Schools were added to Stamford Street in 1864, these were not easy years. In 1867, the Sunday afternoon service at Grosvenor Street was discontinued, and financial problems were never distant. In 1868 and 1869 the Circuit asked for their grant from the Missionary Fund not to be reduced, because of distress in the town, discharge from the Dockyard and reductions in wages.[28] The growth rate for the denomination as a whole fell to – 2·1% for the years 1869–1871,[29] in spite of an economic boom nationally between 1868 and 1872. In 1871 there were debts of £442 on Grosvenor Street, £865 on Stamford Street and £272 on Albert Road. The Circuit baptism register for 1860 reveals a broader cross-section of fathers' occupations than earlier years: there were, for example, a merchant, sailor, labourer, seaman, brickmaker, 'officer' and railway porter. The explanation lies in the developing economy of Portsmouth, but also in the social appeal of the denomination. The baptism registers, however, give more clues about this appeal. Taking sample years, in 1840 there were five baptisms, in 1850 seven, in 1860 nineteen, but in 1870 only fifteen.[28] It would be dangerous to read too much into this limited sample, but it could suggest some falling-off in membership. The total of the membership figures in these years do not support decline, but do reveal a failure of the denomination to keep pace with popula-

Brougham Road Bible Christian Church, Southsea, c. 1890.

tion growth; for between 1851 and 1871 the population of Portsea Island increased by 58%, whereas total membership rose from only 167 to 176.[28]

In 1864 the Primitives added school-rooms to Jubilee Chapel. J. Petty wrote in 1860:

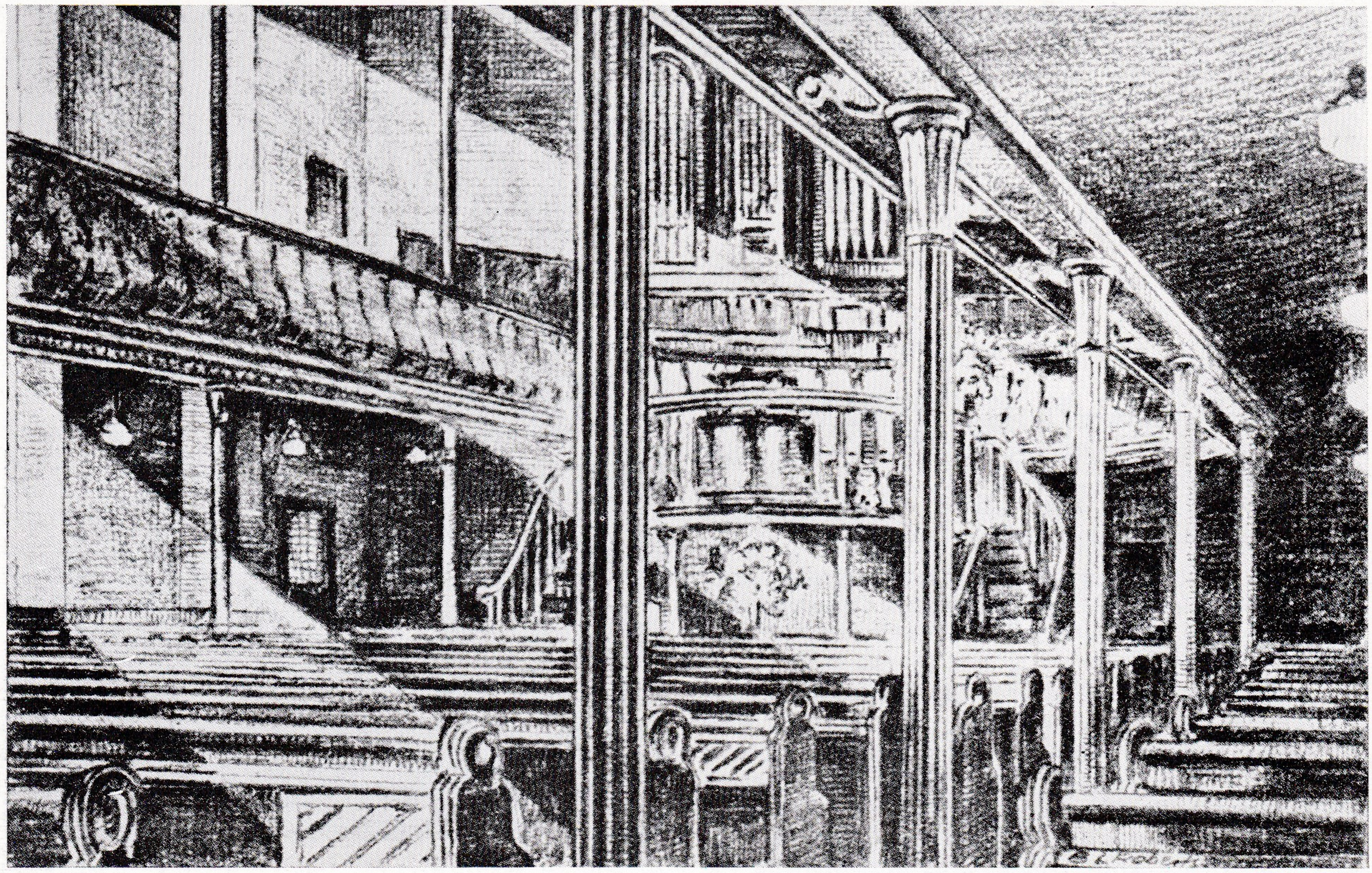
> Look at London, Portsmouth, Bristol . . and several other large towns and cities! How little has the Connexion done for them compared with their pressing wants and its powerful resources!

In too many towns, he added, the Primitive Methodist societies were 'few and feeble . . . compared with the amount of the population'. In 1865 there was a fleeting reference to a place of worship in Larners Road; but it was 1873 before the Ebenezer Chapel in Twyford Avenue was opened, and in 1875, as we have seen, the Albert Road Chapel was bought from the Bible Christians. No evidence regarding the social aspect of the Primitives' membership in these years has survived. Perhaps their open-air services, for example, at Somers Road, Stamshaw, Bedhampton and Albert Road, and a camp-meeting at Bedhampton (all in a plan for 1875 which has survived) were not the kind of services aimed at those who conformed to accepted standards of behaviour, though one writer claims that there was still revival – though not of this type – among the middle classes.[30] That the Primitives did not do so well in town at first probably caused the opening of country chapels at Bedhampton in 1875 and Purbrook in 1879.[31]

In the third quarter of the century the Wesleyans did not move as close to Dissent as they were to do later, but already there was some pressure beginning to build up against the barriers which had been set up to prevent disturbance within. An example may be taken from the temperance movement which in the mid-1830s had passed quickly from moderation to teetotal principles. It developed outside the denominational framework and received little or no encouragement from the churches in the 1830s and 1840s, the Wesleyans in 1841 going so far as to prevent teetotal meetings on their premises. By and large the other Methodist denominations, and other dissenters, chiefly the Congregationalists and Baptists, welcomed the movement.[32] In the 1860s, in Portsmouth, there is evidence of a change in the Wesleyan attitude. In 1864, at the Arundel Street Chapel, a group of young teetotallers was formed who would have been known normally as the Band of Hope, but were obliged to call themselves the 'Hopeful Band' because of likely opposition. Two years later one of the temperance lecturers that the movement produced – Billy Dunn – visited the town to conduct a temperance mission. The Arundel Street Sunday School Committee invited him to speak, giving much publicity to the proposed meeting. The Superintendent Minister, however, advised the trustees to forbid the meeting. The amusing result was that the trustees cut off the gas supply to the schoolroom, but the 'Hopeful Band' persevered and held their meeting by candle-light. Having achieved this success, they were able to re-name themselves a Band of Hope in conformity with the rest of the movement. In 1873, when the Portsmouth Band of Hope and Abstainers' Union was in fact formed, they paid an official visit to a Crystal Palace Concert. This change in attitude was not confined to Arundel Street. In a pew-rent book for Green Row there are Band of Hope pledges for 1867–8, and in 1869 the Daniel Street trustees allowed the Band of Hope to meet in the schoolroom once every three weeks.[33] It is significant of the Bible Christians' attitude in Portsmouth to this question of reform that in 1857 and possibly earlier they supported the movement; in the Quarterly Meeting Minutes for 29 September of that year, Grosvenor Street is shown as receiving ten shillings for 'Teetotalers Gass', a contrast to the action of the trustees at Arundel Street!

* * *

In the last quarter of the century church-building and renovation took on a new lease of life and proceeded unabated. It was at this period too that reference was made to 'churches' rather than 'chapels'. In the late 1870s it is distinctly noticeable among the Bible Christians, for instance. In their Circuit accounts when Brougham Road (opened 1876) was referred to



for the first time in 1877 it is as a 'Church'. In 1874 both Grosvenor Street and Stamford Street had been referred to as 'Chapels'. The readiness to respond to a need in growing areas, in Buckland and Southsea, Copnor and Drayton, where the wealthier – generally speaking – were moving, or in most cases had already moved, brought recruitment difficulties in filling the places occupied by those who left, and serious financial problems not only for the church concerned but for the circuit as a whole. As the deserted town-centre churches were faced with this recruitment problem, all Methodist churches were having to contend with serious numerical decline by early in the twentieth century. Some people, aided by the development of urban transport and then the motor-car, continued to travel from the suburbs. This happened not only at Pembroke Road (formerly Green Row) as we have seen, but also, for example, at Arundel Street even after destruction of the premises in the Second World War and the move to temporary premises.[34] Indeed, many churches continued to be represented through several generations, and a respectability (whether good or bad) emerged in such a social situation. Most church histories make reference to their loyal families; for instance:

> . . . the Methodist Society at Eastney has been served by whole families, in some cases through three generations, who have been continuously identified with the life of the church. . . .[35]

What, then, were the new suburban churches? Each of the three older churches were mother churches to these infants, whether directly or indirectly. Arundel Street was responsible for Buckland in Kingston Road (opened 1875), Wingfield Street (1878), Havant (1889), Twyford Avenue (1903), Copnor (1911), Drayton (1914) and Wymering (1934); Daniel Street for Victoria Road (1878) and Trinity (1901); Pembroke Road (formerly Green Row) for Victoria Road (1878), South Street (1878), Eastney (1877–1886) and Rivers Street (1887). Buckland had its origins in a Sunday School begun in 1858 which moved premises several times. Wingfield Street was a mission church; a new building was erected in 1929. A group first met at Copnor in 1903, in an iron building erected in 1911, and a permanent structure in 1932. Sunday School work had been under way at Twyford Avenue since the 1870s. But by the early years of the twentieth century Arundel Street, which itself had new schoolrooms in 1882, began to decline numerically. In 1909 two reasons for this were given by a member himself in a postscript to *Reminiscences of Wesley Sunday School, 1845–1910* (p. 28):

> (1) Circuit expansion and the increase in the neighbourhood of other Christian agencies and (2) a considerable movement of the better class residents away from the Wesley area, and a consequent change in the character of the population. The former has diverted members, workers and scholars to new causes, and the latter has at the same time increased the difficulties of work in the immediate neighbourhood.

In 1912, some recovery occurred, but this was checked by the Great War, and after that the increased development of the neighbourhood into a commercial area as well as the move to the suburbs was given as a reason for decline. The move even affected the new churches. There is evidence that Buckland suffered

Interior of Wesley Church, Arundel Street, Portsmouth in the early twentieth century.

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.

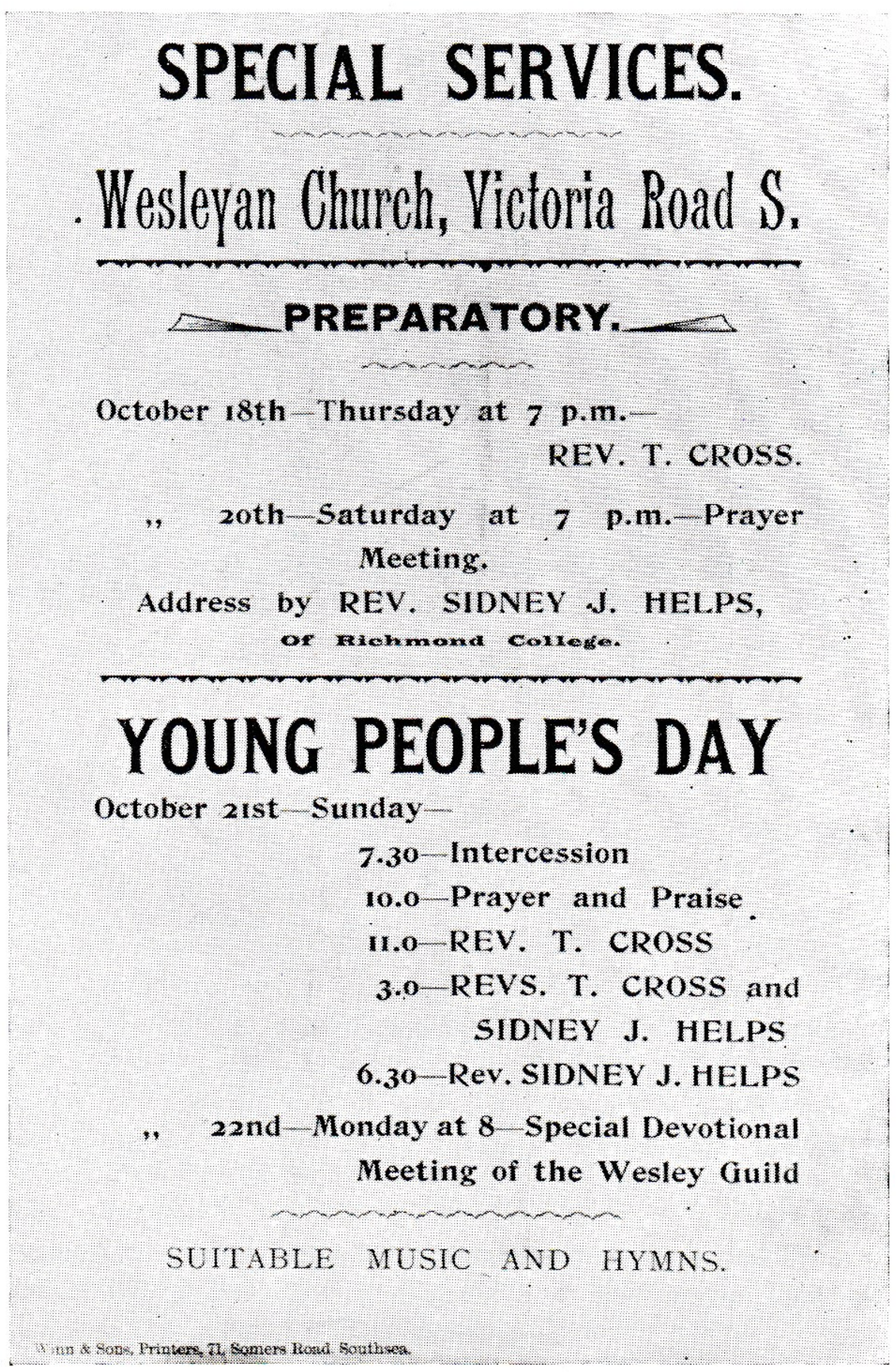
when Twyford Avenue was opened, and at a Buckland church meeting in 1913 concern was expressed at the decrease in numbers. Curiously, the Twyford Avenue trustees of 1903 came from a wide area, from Landport, North End, Havant and even Romsey. In the lists of trustees for Wingfield Street further movement can be traced; in 1904 they all lived on Portsea Island, but in 1928 addresses included Purbrook, Havant and Southbourne. Despite Daniel Street's financial aid to Victoria Road in 1882, enlargements to its own premises in 1880 and new Sunday Schools in 1882, only eight years later it too was a victim of population shift. On 25 September 1890, at a leaders' meeting at Victoria Road, it was stated:

> . . . that Mr. Adams desired to transfer his class from Portsea to Southsea as almost all the members resided at Southsea and those living at Portsea had been otherwise provided for. . . .

A group first met at Victoria Road (formerly Chester Road) in 1865. Despite links with Daniel Street, it was institutionally an offspring of the Pembroke Road (Green Row) Circuit. The land on which building took place was owned, curiously enough, by Josiah Webb, a descendant of the Joseph noted for his work in Wesley's lifetime and later. Trinity was first referred to in the Southsea Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes in 1890, but the iron structure erected in 1892 was a result of the pioneering efforts of a Sunday School teacher from Daniel Street. Both Victoria Road and Trinity served the needs of Southsea in its heyday as a holiday resort, as St. Jude's had done for the Anglicans since 1851. South Street Mission began from Pembroke Road in 1878, being superseded by Grigg Street in 1888. In 1887 an enlargement of the Soldiers' Home at Eastney was opened, and when a new Central Hall was opened in 1928, about a quarter of the cost was provided by the sale of Pembroke Road and Rivers Street in 1919. Rivers Street had been begun as a missionary enterprise in 1886 and on 9 March 1887 after a 'successful mission' the Pembroke Road leaders resolved that 'Rivers Street form a separate society'. In the early years of the next century, however, Pembroke Road, despite modernisation in 1889, experienced rapid and serious decline. There was a hint of this in the 1890s. In 1896 no money was available for the Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association, nor for the Salvation Army. Then in 1898 a member aged seventy-four died, and in the centenary sketch of 1911 there were further references to some who had recently died, and several members were in their eighties at the time. At the leaders' meeting on 29 January 1908 a long discussion was held about the spiritual welfare of the church. Between 1900 and 1902 membership had fallen from 146 to 117. But all this was the background to what the minister stated at a leaders' meeting on 9 December 1910:

> He had noticed there was a number of people, especially young people, who attended the services Sunday by Sunday, but had not as yet joined themselves to the Church as members and he thought that a series of special services would be helpful in attaining this end.

The Great War, despite any mood of optimism when it ended, prevented recovery; Pembroke Road was sold in 1919.[36]



SPECIAL SERVICES.

Wesleyan Church, Victoria Road S.

PREPARATORY.

October 18th—Thursday at 7 p.m.—
REV. T. CROSS.

,, 20th—Saturday at 7 p.m.—Prayer Meeting.
Address by REV. SIDNEY J. HELPS,
Of Richmond College.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S DAY

October 21st—Sunday—
7.30—Intercession
10.0—Prayer and Praise
11.0—REV. T. CROSS
3.0—REVS. T. CROSS and SIDNEY J. HELPS
6.30—Rev. SIDNEY J. HELPS

,, 22nd—Monday at 8—Special Devotional Meeting of the Wesley Guild

SUITABLE MUSIC AND HYMNS.

Printers, 71, Somers Road, Southsea.

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.

What also happened in the Wesleyan Circuits in the first decade of the twentieth century were several short-lived attempts to expand. For example, in the Wesley Circuit in the years 1901 and 1902 only, there are references to two members at Waterlooville, and the 'cause' was declared lost in mid-summer 1902. In the Southsea Circuit there is first mention of a society at Goldsmith Avenue in 1903, but despite the trust here asking for a temporary building in November 1905 the site was sold the next month. In short, overall membership had not kept pace with population growth, despite vast expenditure and more church-building. Between 1881 and 1891 membership had grown faster, but between 1891 and 1900-1901 it failed to keep in line with the greater number of souls to be saved. In 1891 there was one member to every 112 of the population, but in 1900–1, this dropped to one to every 124. Membership rose by 6·7%: population by 18·5%. The only result which could be expected from such a situation was a natural desire to make up lost ground, but it did bring debt, and when numbers declined it produced even more debt. The total membership of the Wesley Circuit dropped from 926 in 1896 to 886 in 1901 and to 867 in 1906. When the Wesley Circuit held debt relief schemes in 1904–7 and 1920, holding grand bazaars in the Town Hall, the words of John Wesley in 1790 or of Rev. W. Myles in 1817 against excessive expenditure on chapel (church)-building might have been echoed. Writing in 1894, however, Rev. H. Smith stated in his *Wesleyan Methodism in Portsmouth* (p. 5):

> Within the last twenty-five years the Wesleyan Churches have undertaken Church and Sunday School enterprises involving an expenditure of not less than £30,000.

On 29 March 1934 the *Methodist Recorder* wrote of the 'Wesley Circuit's Fine Extension Scheme':

> The time came when the Wesley Circuit launched its scheme for a new Church at Drayton, a new Church and Schools at Copnor, and reconstruction at Wesley . . . This Circuit scheme involved an expenditure of £18,500. . . .

More building with accompanying problems[36] also affected the Bible Christians and Primitive Methodists.

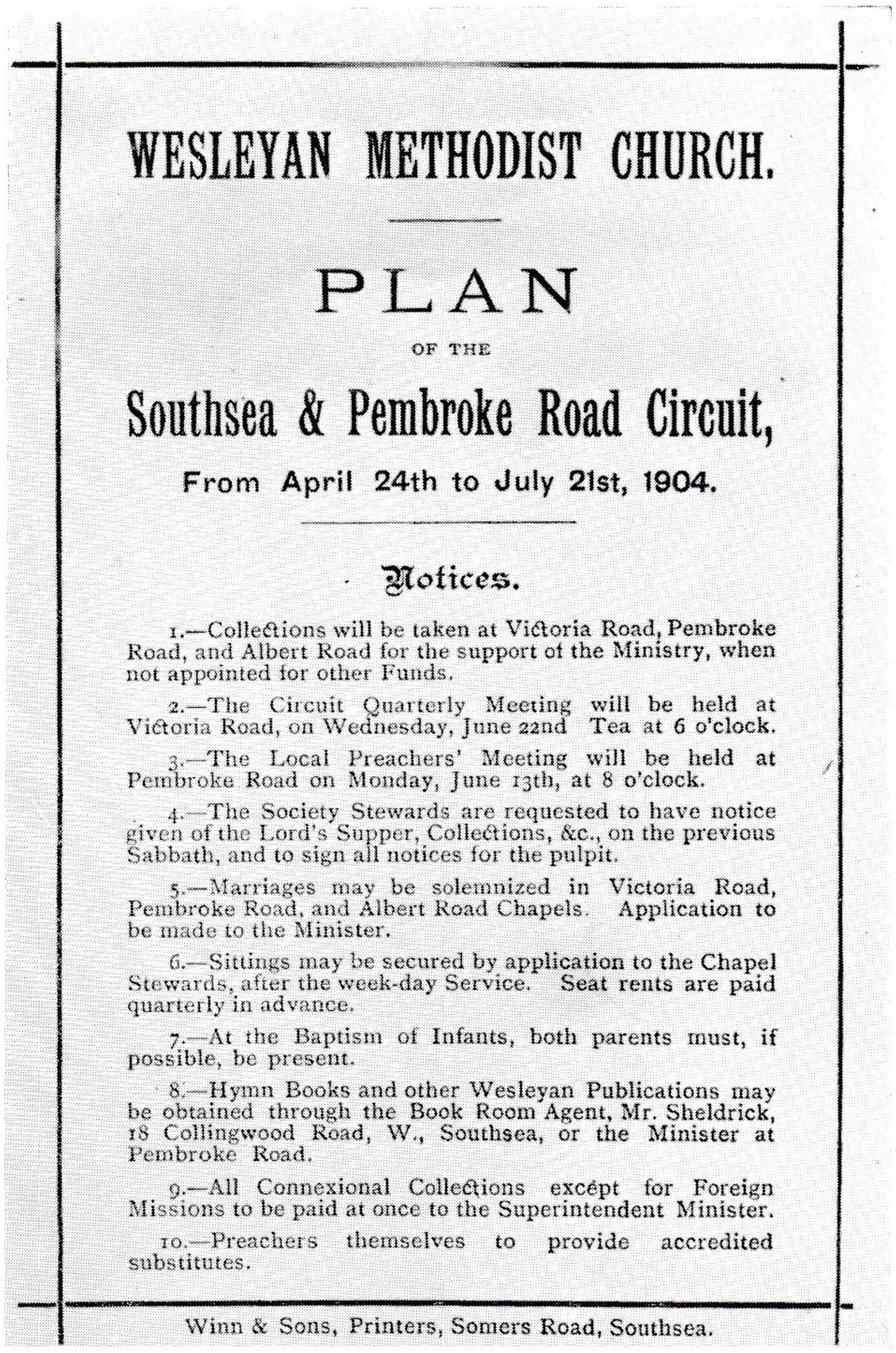
The Bible Christians united in 1907 on a national level with the Methodist New Connexion and the United Methodist Free Churches to form the United Methodist Church. In 1893 Fawcett Road Church was opened, and though it led numerically over Stamford Street, except for two years (1904 and 1906), the Brougham Road Church, replacing Grosvenor Street, always had the highest membership. The denomination's Conferences were held here in 1878, 1886 and 1896. Powerscourt Road was opened in 1903; the Quarterly Meeting Minutes had pointed out on 24 October 1899 that the building was to take account of population movement. Between 1860 and 1900 more Bible Christian Churches were built in the town than the denomination's national rate of new building. But this ought not to conceal the difficulties they had in equal measure to the Wesleyans. In 1892 it was decided to defer the question of a mission in New Road, and at the Quarterly Meeting on 17 June 1896 it was reported:

> In common with all our fellow Christians of the various denominations we find it difficult to secure the attendance of outsiders who have never been accustomed to religious services whether by the putting forth of ordinary or extraordinary means. In our open-air work which is being resumed in all 3 congregations we have some reason to think that words of gospel truth and love fall on the ears of passers-by which we pray and believe may hereafter prove good seed of the Kingdom dropped into prepared soil.

Two years later, however, the pastor's report referred to the fact that 'the year has not been filled with sweeping revivals . . .' In 1900 there was a decrease of twenty-three members; by 1906 some recovery seemed apparent in the figures, but in 1907 it was stated that 'during the past year our death-roll has been exceptionally heavy', a parallel to Pembroke Road. After their Union of 1907 no membership figures have survived. As for the Primitives, they replaced in 1901 the iron building in Albert Road with a new Central Hall at a cost of £2,300, a modest sum in contrast to the finer Wesleyan buildings, but comparing favourably with the smaller ones. Primitives had been meeting at Stamshaw since the 1870s, and in 1913 a new church was opened in Twyford Avenue, five of the seven trustees already living at North End. The brief existence of a church at Eastney between 1904 and 1919 was similar to, though lasting longer than, the short-lived existence of Wesleyans at Waterlooville and Goldsmith Avenue in these years.[37]

* * *

During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, the Wesleyan circuit machinery in Portsmouth, as in expanding towns elsewhere, was under some strain, just as industrialisation and urbanisation had affected the parochial system of the Church of England in the eighteenth century. Several attempts were made to gear the circuit machinery to the demands made upon it. The great number of new churches had to be slotted into the circuit system, which needed modification to deal not only with these but also with urban and popu-



WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH.

PLAN

OF THE

Southsea & Pembroke Road Circuit,

From April 24th to July 21st, 1904.

Notices.

1.—Collections will be taken at Victoria Road, Pembroke Road, and Albert Road for the support of the Ministry, when not appointed for other Funds.

2.—The Circuit Quarterly Meeting will be held at Victoria Road, on Wednesday, June 22nd Tea at 6 o'clock.

3.—The Local Preachers' Meeting will be held at Pembroke Road on Monday, June 13th, at 8 o'clock.

4.—The Society Stewards are requested to have notice given of the Lord's Supper, Collections, &c., on the previous Sabbath, and to sign all notices for the pulpit.

5.—Marriages may be solemnized in Victoria Road, Pembroke Road, and Albert Road Chapels. Application to be made to the Minister.

6.—Sittings may be secured by application to the Chapel Stewards, after the week-day Service. Seat rents are paid quarterly in advance.

7.—At the Baptism of Infants, both parents must, if possible, be present.

8.—Hymn Books and other Wesleyan Publications may be obtained through the Book Room Agent, Mr. Sheldrick, 18 Collingwood Road, W., Southsea, or the Minister at Pembroke Road.

9.—All Connexional Collections excépt for Foreign Missions to be paid at once to the Superintendent Minister.

10.—Preachers themselves to provide accredited substitutes.

Winn & Sons, Printers, Somers Road, Southsea.

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.

lation growth which had produced the new churches in new areas as local initiative had responded to the need. The responsibility for work among the armed services became involved in the adjustment.

In 1874 two circuits were created: the Green Row and Wesley Circuits. In September 1883, the Green Row Circuit was divided into the Green Row (Pembroke Road) and Southsea (with Victoria Road as head) circuits. The former included the Pembroke Road, Eastney (till 1891), Rivers Street and Grigg Street churches. The Southsea Circuit included Victoria Road, Daniel Street (till 1898) and Albert Road (Trinity) churches. Wesley Circuit comprised the remainder. Daniel Street and Eastney, together with the organisation of Army and Navy work, presented special problems. In 1887 there was an unsuccessful suggestion to make Daniel Street head of a new circuit, and in 1894 a more precise proposal to make it a Home Mission Station was carried. In 1891 the Pembroke Road Circuit decided that 'owing to the intimate association of the Military with the Civilian interests at Eastney' it was 'unequal to accept the care' of Eastney which then passed to the Wesley Circuit till 1898. The disputes which had been building up over the responsibility for Army and Navy work produced in 1898 a separate Wesleyan Garrison and Naval Port Mission. Daniel Street (being clear of debt) was separated from the Southsea Circuit, and Eastney joined the Mission too, all in 1898. The first signs of trouble had been in 1887 when the Pembroke Road Circuit disapproved of the Southsea Circuit's action regarding the Navy, arguing (quite rightly) that it had been its responsibility since 1883. In 1896 the same Circuit was opposed to the Connexion's Army and Navy Committee's intention to have a parade service at the Welcome Mission Hall. In the same year the Wesley Circuit objected to the same Committee's proposal to have a Sunday morning parade service near the Arundel Street Chapel, and in an undenominational building.[36] This reaction was not peculiar to Portsmouth. 'It was even alleged [in 1886]', writes K. S. Inglis,[38] 'that some circuit officials in London discouraged the missionary activity of their own denomination when in their judgment it came too near existing chapels'. One wonders if the words of Wesley in 1779 were recalled:

> I took a view of that camp adjoining to the town [Portsmouth] . . . But there was no chaplain. The English soldiers of this age have nothing to do with God![39]

The upshot for Portsmouth in 1897 was that when the Superintendent of the Wesley Circuit met the Committee in London:

> The Committee stated that they would endeavour to secure a favourable site for building premises and carrying on the work, failing which they thought that Daniel Street Chapel might be adapted for the work.

Daniel Street was. The responsibility was swept out of the hands of the existing circuits in 1898 and removed from traditional ties.[36] The United Methodists (formerly Bible Christians) were also aware of the needs of the armed services. In 1913 the Portsmouth District, stretching from Brighton, the Channel Isles, Liphook, Salisbury, Portland and the Isle of Wight, initiated enquiries with regard to the Admiralty and Army appointing United Methodist ministers as chaplains for United Methodists in the Army and Navy.[40]

In 1900 the Pembroke Road and Southsea Circuits were re-united; this had been talked of since 1892 but Pembroke Road remained opposed to the scheme. After 1898 there was more support, and in July 1900 the decision for one Southsea and Pembroke Road Circuit was taken. In September 1919 Eastney rejoined this Circuit, Pembroke Road being sold in July. By this time, Queen Street Hall had replaced Daniel Street Church in 1913. It was stated in a leaflet prepared for the foundation-stone laying that:

> . . . the way has opened up for us to move out from a forsaken locality – where for years we have been sidetracked and hidden away – right into the main thoroughfare of Portsea . . . to . . . make an appeal to the thousands who pass up and down this great main artery of the town every day. . . .

– remarks symptomatic of the changed Wesleyan outlook to be discussed shortly. Mission services were held at Queen Street, in the Town Hall, in the Duchess of Albany Hall (Edinburgh Road) and Alfred Street Hall. In 1927 the Central Hall, Fratton Road, amalgamated with the Town Hall Mission. The Wesley Circuit pursued their own evangelistic activities at the Shaftesbury c nema and Southsea beach in 1921, for instance, and refused to amalgamate with the Town Hall Mission in 1922.[36]

The Mission Circuit and the Central Hall in Fratton Road were, however, only part of a wider theme involving a new image and a changed social and political outlook among Wesleyans from the 1880s onwards. The Central Hall was caught up not so much in the expansion referred to earlier, but more as a solution to the problems caused by the move to the suburbs, and as representing a greater desire on the part of the Wesleyans for a different approach, new evangelism, in short the 'Forward Movement' as championed by Hugh Price Hughes. The opening of the first building in Fratton Road in 1889 (there were new buildings in 1900 and 1928) following upon a Sunday School, may be considered together with a visit of Moody and Sankey to Daniel Street in 1882, missions at Arundel Street in 1886, and at Pembroke Road in 1887 and 1890. Most important of all, it cut through denominational barriers. It coincided with a change in outlook regarding seat rents – to remove them and win larger congregations. In 1887 they were replaced by collections at Wingfield Street. At Daniel Street in 1888 free sittings were made available in the gallery and from 1891 all seats were free on Sunday evenings. The more traditional element persisted; in 1909 the Wesley Circuit refused to abolish seat rents.[36] Perhaps abolition aggravated financial troubles. At the Fawcett Road Bible Christian Church, though a proposal to abolish them in 1893 for one year was approved at the vote, yet in 1894 the rents (apparently resumed) were stated to be insufficient. And when in 1922 the envelope system was introduced at Brougham Road for society funds, seat rents were still charged for trust accounts.[41] Central Halls and the new evangelism, then, were a response to problems of urban growth, to the recruitment difficulties thrown up in the centre of town as the wealthier moved, in the case of Portsmouth, off Portsea Island completely in some cases. One writer has talked of Central Halls as the 'cathedrals'[42] of Wesleyanism, but this is to consider them in isolation from the overall development of the denomination. Indeed, it does not take account of the statement made by one of the speakers at the opening of the additions to the Victoria Soldiers' Home at Eastney in 1887, that such halls as the one provided were required in order to 'keep the soldiers from the public house, to keep them sober, and educate them'. This leads immediately into the background to the new Wesleyan image, the emergence of the nonconformist conscience.

There has been some doubt expressed as to the nature of what became known as the nonconformist conscience. Whether or not it was more a social pressure group than an expression of outraged morality,[43] one cannot doubt that the social and political outlook of the Wesleyans changed, and they began to express themselves more forcibly and co-operate not only with other nonconformists but also with the other divisions of Methodism. A triumph of the laymen locally could be looked for, but what the evidence in Portsmouth shows was a complete disintegration of the denominational structure of the 1830s and 1840s, and an evangelism conducted not

Garrison and Naval Port Wesleyan Mission,
PORTSMOUTH.

Town Hall Mission

"For God and Humanity."

SUNDAY EVENINGS
FOR
THE PEOPLE.

908th Service, February 25th, 1923.

6.15 ORGAN RECITAL
6.30 PRAISE SERVICE
7.0 GOSPEL SERVICE

Preacher—REV. J. PARRY BROOKS
Soloist—MR. E. HARVEY, D.C.M.

Officers of the Mission—
Rev S. Hankin Hardy, h.c.f. (Military Work), 64, Campbell Road, Southsea [Tel. 3867
Rev. J. Parry Brooks, h.c.f. (Town Hall Minister) 5, St Ursula Gr., S'thsea [Tel. 4402
Rev. Irving Davies, r.n. (Naval Chaplain), R.N. Barracks, Portsmouth
Sister Agatha, Duchess of Albany's Hall, Edinburgh Road.
Sister Emma, 29, Drummond Rd., Lake Rd. (Queen St. and Alfred St.)
Stewards—Mr. J. C. Thompson, 23, Elm Grove, Southsea. (Tel. 6596)
Mr. W. Hedger, 79, Lincoln Road, Fratton
Musical Director—Mr. W. Lawrence, 81, Fawcett Road, Southsea

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.

through the old denominational machinery, but with new secular techniques and tactics at a social and political level. Out of reaction to the Oxford Movement within the Church of England, the Wesleyans moved out of their midway position and considered themselves Free Churchmen in theory and practice, a situation rather like their temporary alliance with Dissent almost a century earlier. A contemporary Wesleyan view of this progress in 1894 was:

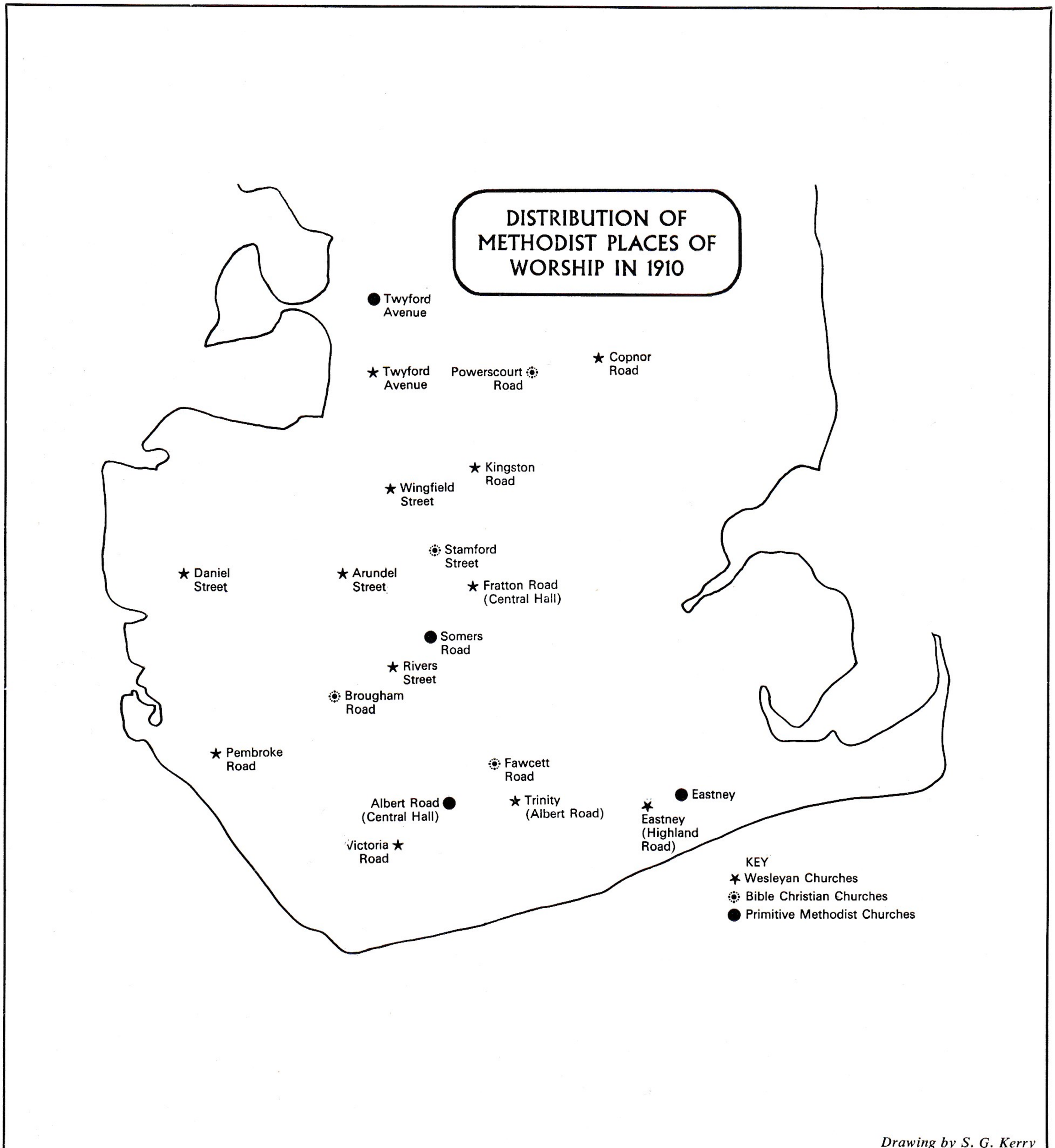
> The Methodist Churches have also come to see . . . that it is their duty to take a greater interest in the material and social welfare of our towns. That it is their duty to take part in beautifying and purifying them, making their philanthropic machinery as perfect as possible, their civic relations more righteous, providing them with art galleries, parks, libraries and music, and carrying out as far as possible the whole programme of social reform. Methodism in Portsmouth now is not unlike that of other towns. It has its representatives in Councils and Committees . . . Methodists are now upon the Magistrates' Bench, Councillors are in the Town Council, others are on the Board of Guardians and our junior M.P. is a well-known Wesleyan Local Preacher.[44]

Portsmouth Methodists – of all groups – certainly asserted themselves more keenly on social and moral issues, and found a newly-won self-confidence in social and political life. Very often this had an air of resistance to change about it, and a despair with society as a whole for which they tried to set a code of conduct. Occasionally, the Wesleyans were disturbed when trying to reconcile their actions with earlier conduct.

The temperance (teetotal) movement, for instance, now received more Wesleyan support. At Pembroke Road from 1886 unfermented wine was used at the Communion service and in 1890 it was resolved that a temperance meeting should be held once a quarter. But perhaps there was a little uncertainty persisting when Wingfield Street in 1882 was not allowed to be used as a Templars' Lodge, though by 1914 the Good Templars were recorded as paying £1 per quarter in rent, and then in 1924 the Rechabites used the premises for fifteen shillings per quarter. There was definitely some unease lingering at Arundel Street in the 1880s. In 1880 a Mutual Improvement Society was formed, but in 1882, when they wished to meet in the new school-rooms, they were forbidden to do so unless they abandoned the teetotal pledge as a condition of membership. As a result, the Society met at St. Phillip's Mission in Fratton Grove for a few years till the trustees gave way, the Society becoming known as the Wesley Guild in 1904. After 1853 the temperance movement entered its 'prohibitionist' phase, campaigning for the legislative suppression of the drink trade, and this gained momentum after 1870. It was at such a political level that the Wesleyans (and Bible Christians) gave whole-hearted support. In 1893 the Bible Christian Circuit recorded its support for the government in its introduction of the Direct Veto Bill; in 1903 the Wesley Circuit, and in 1904 the Bible Christian Circuit, felt the need for new legislation to control the liquor traffic; in 1907 the Wesley Circuit, and in the next year the Southsea Circuit, registered their support for temperance legislation and the new Liberal government's Licensing Bill. Sabbatarianism held an important place in the procedure for imposing moral standards on society. A conversation 'on the appaling ammount [sic] of Sabbath desecration in the Borough' took place at the Pembroke Road leaders' meeting on 19 June 1901, and it was therefore to be put to the 'Nonconformist Councle [sic]'. At Daniel Street in 1902 the voice of protest was raised against the noise of the GPO van on Sunday evenings, and a request that it might be diverted was made. In 1907 annoyance was caused, 'by the sale of goods by outcry, during Sunday worship', and the Wesley Circuit sent a letter to the Chief Constable on the subject. Similarly, the Southsea Circuit opposed Sunday morning trams in 1909. On a more political – though still moral – level, there was opposition from the Wesley Circuit in 1902 to the Education Bill which would (and did) abolish School Boards. In the same year the same Circuit and the Bible Christian Circuit protested against the use of Chinese labour in South Africa. Whatever the reasons binding the Wesleyans to the Liberal party, these were elements of opposition vital to the formulation of a Liberal political programme. The quarterly meeting minutes of the Wesley Circuit in the early 1900s are peppered with temperance and education schedules indicating the numerical fortunes of these two causes. Behind the new confidence in Methodist circles, however, lay another force – that of nonconformist co-operation, latent for so long throughout the century. When the new Sunday Schools were opened at Arundel Street in 1881, all the nonconformist Sunday Schools attended, and in 1891 the Arundel Street Sunday School itself joined the Portsea Island Sunday School Union. On 2 October 1895, the Pembroke Road leaders:

> decided that the Wednesday evening Service for the next week be given up in consequence of Meetings with the Baptist Union.

In 1908, and possibly earlier, they had representatives on the Free Church Council. The change in Wesleyan attitude was remarkable: they now co-



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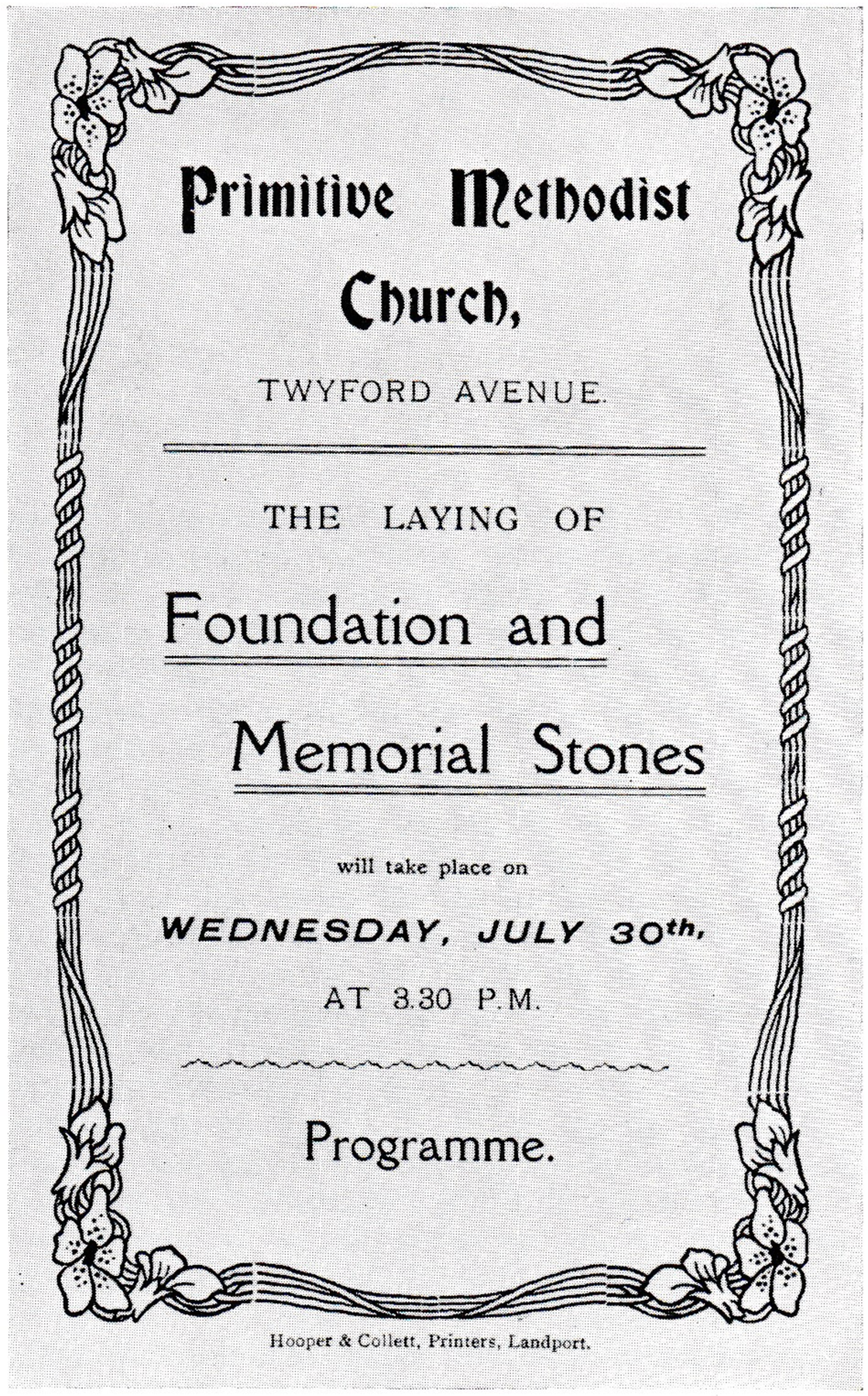

By courtesy of the Methodist Church, Portsmouth and Southsea Circuit.

operated, for instance, with the Bible Christians who referred in 1899 to the 'great battle with priestcraft' before them.[36, 41]

While nonconformist co-operation was not new, great changes had nevertheless taken place among Methodists. There now seemed to be a greater proportion of those comfortably provided for, and the entertainment aspect of church life, coupled with the decline of the class meeting and the rise of worship, have been regarded by some writers[45] as assuming a greater importance. Reference has already been made to the substitution of the label 'church' for 'chapel', the social conditions that came of several generations worshipping at the same place and more personnel becoming prominent in public life. The Wingfield Street trustees in 1878 comprised mostly tradesmen; by 1904 there was a schoolmaster and a solicitor; then in 1928 three gentlemen. The Twyford Avenue (Wesleyan) trustees in 1903 included a schoolmaster and a gentleman. Although the term 'gentleman' most probably did not denote someone of completely independent means, it was nevertheless evidence of a greater feeling of respectability within the denomination than formerly. Church histories are proud – and quite rightly – of members who have 'done well' and one may guess have risen socially. A similar trend is apparent in the Bible Christian denomination. Among the fathers' occupations listed in the baptism register in 1900 are an Army sergeant and an inspector of fitters in the Dockyard, together with those occupations such as painter and labourer which predominated in the registers for the random years of 1880 and 1890. The trustees of Brougham Road Church in 1915 consisted mostly of tradesmen, but also a schoolmaster and the manager of a limited company. Increasing emphasis was placed on the pleasant and social aspects of church life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The opening of Victoria Road Church on 30 January 1878 was a great day of feasting as well as of worship and fellowship. Social meetings of all kinds tended to replace class meetings. At the Brougham Road Church's anniversary in 1910, 'a very good time was enjoyed by those present'.[36, 41] This meeting was a contrast to the revival days of 1848–51, when the pastor was reported[46] to have said:

> I have held meetings every night except Saturday at Grosvenor Street Chapel, for more than a fortnight, and glory be to God in the highest! some soul or souls have been hopefully converted every night. . . .

The contrast can be exaggerated. The early nineteenth-century Methodists did not lack their 'good times'; Rev. W. Myles, for instance, described the love-feast as 'a religious entertainment'.[42] Nor, on the other hand, was all missionary zeal lost later.

* * *

The co-operation among the Methodist denominations as the Wesleyans joined the nonconformist ranks paved the way for the Union of 1932. On 24 May 1902 the Wesley Circuit noted:

> The Superintendent reported that the Primitive Methodist and Bible Christian Synods would be held in Portsmouth, and that as the former would extend over the first Sunday in May, he had been asked whether any of our pulpits would be available for their ministers. Unanimously resolved that the offer be very cordially accepted.

When the ceremony for laying the foundation-stone of the Twyford Avenue Primitive Methodist Church took place in 1913, the Wesleyan Church in Twyford Avenue was loaned for a public meeting. Pembroke Road Circuit had been in favour of Methodist Union since 1887, despite the disputes over Army and Navy work in the next decade. Union, too, was an aim of the

Forward Movement.[42] After the Great War, it has been stated, the mood of optimism was favourable to ecumenical plans.[47] Union might also, it was thought at the time, have been a solution to declining membership, though in practice it proved otherwise. After the decline, especially involving the failure to keep pace with population growth at the turn of the century, Methodists in Portsmouth as elsewhere never caught up again to the membership-population ratio of the 1880s. In 1922 as the Wesley Circuit supported Union, and as the Conference of 1923 examined statistics of the laity's feelings towards Union – showing in the Portsmouth District 124 trusts in favour and only thirty-nine against[47] – the nonconformist conscience was declining. Although an attempt by the Wesley Circuit in 1924 to have drinking facilities withdrawn at the Tramways Employees' Club was successful at Town Council level, opposition to Sunday morning trams was lost earlier the same year.[48] In the early 1930s efforts to prevent an off-licence opposite Copnor Church and a public-house on the corner of Burrfields Road were also defeated.[49]

The nonconformist conscience had been a uniting element in the past; one might therefore expect fragmentation during its decline. But what in fact occurred was Methodist Union. This meant another bout of re-organisation. To the Wesley Circuit were joined the Stamford Street and Powerscourt Road United Methodist Churches, and the Twyford Avenue and Purbrook Primitive Methodist Churches. To the Southsea Circuit were added the Brougham Road and Fawcett Road United Methodist Churches, and the Somers Road, Albert Road (and Emsworth and Bedhampton) Primitive Methodist Churches. Union did not solve the membership problem: to take two examples, after 1934 the only increases at Copnor Church (Wesleyan) were the results of other churches closing;[49] and in 1935 when Albert Road Church (Primitive) was closed there may in practice have been a transfer of membership, but no official reference to it in the minutes. In September 1952 the Southsea and Portsmouth (Wesley) Circuits were combined, reverting rather strangely to the situation before the Green Row and Wesley Circuits had emerged separately in 1874. The Mission Circuit (which incidentally had opposed Union in the 1920s[50]) comprising Fratton and Eastney Central Halls and Queen Street Church, remained separate in 1952. It is doubtful if the Methodist movement in Portsmouth had been a *numerical* success by 1932, but in what ways and over what periods of time does one measure *religious* success?

NOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

PCRO	Portsmouth City Record Office
PCRO Meth.	Records of Portsmouth and Southsea Methodist Circuit in PCRO: lists available but no reference numbers assigned at time of publication.
CM	Council Minutes.

1 Smith, H., *Wesleyan Methodism in Portsmouth* (1894). E.g. Main, J., *Pembroke Road Wesleyan Church, Portsmouth* (1911); Cushen, E. E., *The Story of a Hundred Years: Wesley Church, Portsmouth* (1945); Phillips, R. L., *Methodism in Eastney, Portsmouth* (1967).

2 Curnock, N. (ed.), *The Journal of John Wesley* (1938), vol. iv, pp. 74, 83; vol. vi, p. 105. Telford, J. (ed.), *The Letters of John Wesley* (1931), vol. iii, p. 115.

3 Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–22.

4 Curnock, *op. cit.*, vol. viii, p. 16; vol. v, pp. 291, 393.

5 PCRO: 22A/1/22. I am grateful to Mrs. M. J. Hoad for this reference.

6 Telford, *op. cit.*, vol. vii, pp. 224–5.

7 Telford, *op. cit.*, vol. vi, p. 335; vol. viii, pp. 72, 75, 206.

8 Smith, G., *History of Wesleyan Methodism* (1859–1865), vol. ii, pp. 222, 301–2.

9 *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 December 1805, 1 July 1811.

10 *Hampshire Telegraph*, 22 April 1811. Smith, H., *op. cit.*, p. 47.

11 Townsend, W. J., Workman, H. B., and Eayrs, G., *A New History of Methodism* (1909), vol. ii, p. 42.

12 *Hampshire Telegraph*, e.g. 16 February 1835, 25 January 1836.

13 *Hampshire Telegraph*, 9 June 1817, 20 April 1835, 27 March 1837, 20 April 1840, 6 September 1841, 20 May 1844.

14 Inglis, K. S., *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (1963), p. 330.

15 MS letter (1817) in Central Reference Library; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 2 March 1818, 25 November 1839, 5 June 1843. Smith, H., *op. cit.*, p. 64. PCRO Meth: Arundel Street.

16 Taylor, E. R., *Methodism and Politics* (1935). Kent, J. H. S., *The Age of Disunity* (1966), pp. 127ff. But since going to press W. R. Ward has published a counter-opinion. in *Religion and Society in England 1790 -1850* (1972).

17 *Hampshire Telegraph*, e.g., 28 November 1836, 12 November 1838, 24 October 1842, 25 November 1833, 18 December 1826, 10 February 1823, 22 August 1836. PCRO Meth: Pembroke Road. Main, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 5–6.

18 Cushen, *op. cit.*, p. 4. PCRO: 277A. Smith, H., *op. cit.*, p. 65.

19 PCRO Meth: Bible Christian Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes. Bourne, F. W., *The Bible Christians* (1905), pp. 166–8, 271, 320. Hubbuck, R., *Portsea Island Churches* (1969; Portsmouth Paper No. 8).

20 Gates, W. G., *Illustrated History of Portsmouth* (1900), p. 660. *Census of Great Britain*, 1851. *Religious Worship England and Wales* (Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1852–3, LXXXIX), p. 19.

[21] PCRO Meth: Bible Christian *op. cit.*; and Grosvenor Street Elders' Meeting Minutes. *Post Office Directory of Hampshire* (1852).

[22] PCRO Meth: Bible Christian *op. cit.*; Wesleyan; Wingfield Street Trustees' Meeting Minutes. *See also* Kitson Clark, G., *The Making of Victorian England* (1962), pp. 183–4, on social differences between Wesleyans and Primitives.

[23] *Census of Great Britain*, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxviii, 19. On drawbacks of Census, *see* Pickering, W. S. F., in *British Journal of Sociology*, No. 4, December 1967.

[24] Currie, R., *Methodism Divided* (1968), p. 198, n. 3, claims that attendance was never more than double, but it is likely that it was higher than this.

[25] Quo. in Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[26] Burn, W. L., *The Age of Equipoise: a study of the mid-Victorian generation* (1964).

[27] Main, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7, 12–14. Hutchings, G. W., and Elliott, W. A., *A Short H story, 1858–1908, of the Buckland Wesleyan Sunday School, Beeston Street* (1908). Love, G., *Buckland Methodist Church, 1858–1971* (1971). Phillips, R. L., *op. cit.*, pp. 5–6.

[28] PCRO Meth: Bible Christian, *op. cit.*

[29] Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[30] Kitson Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 183–4, but pp. 122–3, refers to image shopkeepers had to perpetuate.

[31] Petty, J., *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (1860), p. 386. Harrod's *Directory of Hampshire* (1865). PCRO Meth: Primitive Methodists. Gates, W. G., *op. cit.*, p. 660.

[32] On all aspects of temperance before 1872, see Harrison, B., *Drink and the Victorians* (1971).

[33] Hull, J. T., *Reminiscences of Wesley Sunday School, Arundel Street, 1845–1910* (1910), pp. 11–13. PCRO Meth: Wesleyan; Daniel Street Trustees' Meeting Minutes and Green Row Leaders' Meeting Minutes.

[34] Cushen, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[35] Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[36] PCRO Meth: Wesleyan; Green Row, Southsea and Wesley Circuit Quarterly Meeting Minutes; individual churches' records. Love, Cushen, Main, Phillips *op. cit.* Sloggett, B. L., *Copnor Methodist Church, 1911–1971* (1971). Burgess, J. E., *A short history of Wesley Central Hall* (1966).

[37] PCRO Meth: Bible Christian *op. cit.*; Primitive Methodists. Kelly's *Directory of Portsmouth* (1901–1920).

[38] Inglis, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[39] Curnock, *op. cit.*, vol. vi, p. 256. Between the time of this comment and the late nineteenth century there is unfortunately no evidence regarding the work of Methodists among the armed services in Portsmouth.

[40] Smith, H., Swallow, J. E., and Treffry, W., *The Story of the United Methodist Church, 1907–1932* (1932), pp. 32, 363–5.

[41] PCRO Meth: Bible Christian Circuit and individual churches' minutes.

[42] Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 211, 132, 178.

[43] Kent, J. H. S., 'H. P. Hughes and the Nonconformist Conscience' in Bennett, G. V., and Walsh, J. D., (eds.) *Essays in Modern English Church History in memory of Norman Sykes* (1966), pp. 181–205.

[44] Smith, H., *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7.

[45] On this topic, *see* Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 125ff.

[46] Bourne, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

[47] Kent, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3, 29. Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 186–7.

[48] PCRO, CM4/30, pp. 492, 546, 615–17, 716, 757–8, 763.

[49] Sloggett, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 31.

[50] Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

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